



Mass Ave/Appleton Design Review Committee

Date: Tuesday, March 23, 2021

Time: 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

Location: Conducted via Remote Participation

Members In attendance: Kim Cayer, Jeff Maxtutis, Phil Goff, Anne DiNoto, Christopher Tonkin, Daniel Amstutz, Mike Rademacher, Wayne Chouinard, Lt. Rick Pedrini, Linda Epstein, S. Nicholas Kriketos.

Others in Attendance: Abbi Holt, Len Diggins, Representative Sean Garballey, Petru Sofio, Thomas Proctor, Galen Mook, Guillermo Hamlin, Jessica Mortell, Jayson Gauvin, Ann LeRoyer, Alison Piaseki, Christine Fort, Mike Barry, Wing Wong, Ruth Schmidt, Rod Holland, Leah Grodstein, Joe Solomon, Alexander Frieden, Kate Byrd, Lynne Eisenberg, Scott Smith, Laura Tennenhouse, Cindy Gallagher, Brenda Cobleigh, Jock Hoffman, Jacob Deck, Brian Ristuccia, Bryan Marden, Adam Auster, Matthew De Remer, Julie Wayman, Bill Copithorne, Thouis Jones.

Minutes

1. Welcome and Opening of Remote Meeting, including Ground Rules.

Daniel Amstutz read a set of prepared remarks explaining the procedures that the Committee would follow to hold a virtual meeting. Governor Baker signed an Executive Order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic allowing virtual meetings, which suspended the usual Open Meeting Law requirement that a quorum of committee members be physically present in order to hold an official committee meeting. Amstutz confirmed the committee members in attendance for the meeting.

Amstutz went over the agenda and explained how committee and public comments would be handled. He also discussed the purpose of the committee and that it was formed by the Select Board on June 8 after a fatal crash at the intersection of Mass Ave and Appleton Street that killed Charlie Proctor in May 2020. The charge of the committee is to study and make recommendations for both short term and long-term improvements to the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Appleton Street. He noted the intersections of Mass Ave and Lowell Street and Mass Ave and Forest Street were not specifically identified by the Board at that time as being under the committee's purview, but they may be

relevant to the committee's work.

2. Committee Members and Brief Introductions.

Amstutz explained the committee membership as approved by the Select Board and put together by the Town Manager:

- Representative of the Transportation Advisory Committee (Jeff Maxtutis)
- Representative of the Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (Christopher Tonkin)
- Representative of the Arlington Police Department (Officer Rateau/Lt. Pedrini)
- Representative of the Engineering Division (DPW) (Mike Rademacher/Wayne Chouinard)
- Senior Transportation Planner (DPCD) (Daniel Amstutz)
- Representative of Local Business (Kim Cayer, the Children's Room)
- Representative of St. Athanasius Parish (S. Nicholas Kriketos)
- 3 Resident Representatives (Phil Goff, Anne DiNoto, and Linda Epstein)

Amstutz invited committee members to introduce themselves and talk about their interest on the committee and goals. Members noted their interest in making the intersection safe for all users and helping to implement recommendations from the committee. Amstutz said the goal of the committee is to improve safety and accessibility for all users of the Mass Ave/Appleton intersection and the adjacent corridor. Kim Cayer added that the safety of school children who attend Ottoson Middle School should also be a key consideration for improving the intersection.

3. Review of Existing Conditions at Mass Ave and Appleton Street.

Amstutz provided an overview of the existing conditions at the intersection, including the operation of the flashing signal/pedestrian signal, recent traffic count data, crash data, reported safety issues, and geometric issues. Traffic count data from the 1165R Mass Ave Apartments Traffic Impact Report used data from February 2020 and showed a little over 13,000 vehicles per day along Mass Ave near this intersection. Pedestrian count data showed almost 120 pedestrians crossing Mass Ave at the Appleton St/Appleton Place intersection in the weekday morning peak hour, many of which are children going to Ottoson Middle School. Reported and identified safety issues include solar glare, red light running, the safety of Ottoson School students crossing in the mornings, lack of separated bicycle facilities, lack of crosswalk on west side of intersection, multiple conflict points with no protected turns, and possible speeding issues. The police department has started blocking left turns from Mass Ave westbound to Appleton Street in the evening, the timing dependent on the angle of the sun. Jeff Maxtutis pointed out that the geometrics of the intersection contribute to many of the problems identified, making it unsafe for all users but particularly people walking and biking.

Amstutz recognized Select Board member Len Diggins and Representative Sean Garballey as being present at the meeting.

Amstutz showed crash data from the 165R Mass Ave Apartments Traffic Impact Report. For the period of 2017-2019 there were 10 crashes at the Mass Ave/Appleton Street intersection, which puts the crash rate slightly above the MassDOT District 4 and statewide crash rates for intersections. He also discussed the geometric issues with the intersection, noting the very wide open space to accommodate the Appleton Street and Appleton Place approaches allows for many places to turn and many conflict points within the intersection.

4. Discussion of Key Design Principles for Reviewing Safety Improvement Concepts.

Amstutz asked the committee to think about and discuss questions of how the design can address the goals of the committee, how different users should be accommodated in the design, and whether certain movements at the intersection should be prohibited. There are trade-offs and considerations with different design approaches. Examples include addressing or prohibiting conflicting movements (Left turns from Mass Ave to Appleton currently being prohibited in the evening by APD); pedestrian crossings and how to make them safer; accommodating bus stops/transit users; accommodating bicyclists; what can and should be addressed in the Short term vs. the long term; and how on-street parking may be impacted by design elements. He invited committee members to discuss these issues before jumping into the design concepts.

Phil Goff asked about the scope of the committee's work, as he believes looking at the blocks west and east (Mass Ave/Lowell and Mass Ave/Forest) are important to consider when thinking about the goals of the committee. Amstutz noted he took the scope from what the Select Board had voted on, but tried to encompass the corridor around the intersection as well. He asked Len Diggins, as a Select Board member, if he had comment on this. Diggins said doing a more comprehensive review of the area would be better, however it may take longer to implement something if the scope is expanded too wide. Nicholas Kriketos said he was curious about the scope as well, and said that the church's position is to protect the safety of users, without creating additional congestion in the area. Linda Epstein said lighting was an issue, particularly with shadows under trees, and the location of the bus stop on the west side of the intersection causes conflicts. Maxtutis asked if this location was identified in the Town's Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, which would help provide some project funding. Amstutz said he didn't think it was, but they intend to make updates to the plan later this year as part of implementing the Connect Arlington Sustainable Transportation Plan. Cayer asked for a definition of short-term and long-term timeframes. Amstutz said his understanding of short-term would be something implementable later this year, and asked Mike Rademacher for his opinion.

Rademacher said short-term improvements would be done with pavement striping, signage, and possibly temporary materials; long-term improvements like a new traffic signal would require funding requests and a longer lead-up for implementation. Christopher Tonkin said he agreed with Epstein about the light issues, and supported an area scope beyond just the intersection, and thanked the police department for blocking the left turns at the intersection. Thomas Proctor said the Select Board had voted to expand the scope of the committee's work and add a representative from Ottoson after the June 8 meeting. Amstutz said he will go back and look at the Board meetings following June 8 to confirm this. Goff asked for clarification about the committee looking at long-term issues as well. Amstutz confirmed that the idea is to review longer-term solutions as well. Cayer suggested the timing of the signal change from flashing light to red could be adjusted to potentially address the red light running. Wayne Chouinard said DPW can review the signal timing for the pedestrian crossing and make sure it conforms with required standards. Petru Sofio noted the signal is old and retiming may be difficult. Galen Mook of MassBike suggested that a disability representative may be beneficial to have on the committee. Anne DiNoto noted there are elderly residents in the neighborhood and at least one person who is hard of hearing. Abbi Holt said sometimes people come down Appleton Place and turn left onto Appleton Street, which is dangerous because they may be turning into opposing traffic on Mass Ave. Guillermo Hamlin agreed a disability representative would be good for the committee.

5. Review of Initial Concepts and Prioritize Design Considerations for Next Meeting.

Amstutz said he posted five different concepts for improving the intersection and corridor and the committee begin discussing each one:

a. Short Term Improvements developed by Phil Goff

Goff said he focused on the corridor between Forest Street and Lowell Street, particularly given the challenges of curves and steepness of the road for cyclists going through here. He tried to focus on things that could be done in short order, in this case through pavement markings. He was particularly concerned with extending the bike lane through here and reducing riding in the "door zone".

Chouinard said the difference in whether some parts of Mass Ave have shared-lane markings or bike lanes has to do with available curb-to-curb width and presence of on-street parking. Goff noted he made notes of locations where on-street parking should be restricted to make it possible to install bike lanes.

b. Short Term Improvements developed Neighborways Design

Jessica Mortell from Neighborways said she developed a concept that

includes bike lanes but does not propose eliminating on-street parking. She said the narrow lane widths (10' car travel lanes) are feasible for roads with bus traffic, but it is very tight. She also proposed creating temporary bump outs at Appleton Street/Appleton Place to reduce crossing distances and require drivers to make tighter turns, and make Appleton Place one-way towards Mass Ave.

Amstutz noted the MBTA typically asks for 11' wide lanes for frequent bus routes, and he would be concerned about a bike lane in the door zone. Chouinard said the geometry changes are critical and agreed with making it more of a T-intersection. He added that there is a lot of truck traffic through here which makes wider lanes more desirable. Kriketos said the church had previously petitioned the Town to make Appleton Place one-way away from Mass Ave; they have concerns of pushing vehicles into the intersection in this concept. Epstein said she agreed with Kriketos and raised concerns about the potential for more truck traffic with the new developments in the area. She also noted there isn't much off-street parking for businesses in the area now, so would be concerned about removing too much on-street parking, but understands it may be needed for improving safety.

c. Redesign concept developed by Petru Sofio

Sofio said his goal was to put a number of different ideas into a concept. He included floating bus stops, a two-stage turn box for cyclists to get up Appleton Street, protected bike lanes, and measures to prevent various turning movements.

Amstutz said he appreciated Sofio's work to include many different elements, some that he had not thought of before. Kriketos said he liked the design elements of narrowing the intersection to reduce the amount of pavement that allows drivers to traverse the intersection in many ways. Goff said some ideas could be pulled out of here to combine with other concepts and he liked the idea of an uphill bike climbing lane on Appleton Street, especially for Ottoson students. Sofio noted parking is restricted going uphill on Appleton Street. Epstein asked about how difficult it would be to move the MBTA bus stop. Amstutz noted the MBTA had done a review of Mass Ave bus stops several years ago to look at their placement and spacing. It would be a longer-term goal due to complications of moving bus stops and addressing concerns of abutters. Proctor said he liked that the double-yellow line is extended through the intersection and turns are required to be made more at 90-degree angles. Holt noted that the number of kids cycling to Ottoson has increased.

d. Short Term Improvements Alternate 1 & 2 (Developed by Green International for the Town)

Jayson Gauvin, from Green International Affiliates, discussed both of the Green International concepts. For concept one, He noted the need to allow left turns from Mass Ave to Appleton Place for abutter access. They tried to address turning to make it more at a 90-degree angle. He noted the number of left turns onto Appleton Street from Mass Ave does meet the warrants for a left turn lane. They considered bike lanes to be a more long-term strategy as it would require negotiation with abutters about on-street parking. The left turn lane would allow drivers to more easily see oncoming traffic. They proposed moving the crosswalk to the west side of the intersection so it would not be in conflict with the left turn lane. They also proposed restricting turns from Appleton Street to Mass Ave, due to low turning movements here.

For the second concept, it has similar improvements to concept one, but it does not include the left turn lane, instead there is a painted median between Appleton Street and Forest Street. They have proposed flashing beacons to replace the current pedestrian signal for the Mass Ave crossing. The temporary geometric improvements, if successful, could be converted to permanent installations. Both concepts restrict parking on the south side of Mass Ave between Appleton Place and Forest Street.

Maxtutis asked about removing the traffic signal equipment. Gauvin said the intent was to improve on the signals due to their age and that drivers may not understand how they work. Maxtutis said this needed to be discussed more as to whether the flashing beacon is equal in safety to the current situation, and he wasn't sure the left turn was a good solution here. Kriketos wondered if the bump out on the south side of the intersection would come out far enough to narrow it. Gauvin said this would depend on the turning movements here and can be refined more. He also noted they have a handicap ramp on Appleton Place near the intersection. Sofio said he was concerned that the design concept showing the shared lane markings in the door zone and said a climbing bike lane should be considered instead. He was also concerned about the possible removal of the existing signal heads and asked if the ban on left turns from Mass Ave to Appleton Street during issues of solar glare would be retained. Gauvin said this restriction could continue to be implemented in this concept. Sofio also suggested the temporary bump out be painted a tan color and include planters for neighborhood beautification. Amstutz noted a time-limited turn restriction can be difficult to enforce, and would continue to require resources invested by the police department, and a self-enforcing design should be implemented here. Epstein said the bump out at Appleton Street would help bicyclists slow down as they approach Mass Ave, as well as car drivers. She said weekend enforcement of the turn restriction in the summer would still be beneficial. Goff suggested considering making the access into Appleton Place a right-in/right-out

condition and eliminating the left turn from Mass Ave onto Appleton Place. Abutters would still be able to access their properties from Burton Street. Chouinard added that Appleton Place could also be converted into a dead end so there would be no access to Mass Ave at all. Kriketos said he would be very concerned about not allowing left turns from Mass Ave to Appleton Place and its effects on the church and the neighborhood.

6. Discuss Next Steps and Set Next Committee Meeting Dates – Frequency and Timing.

Amstutz noted that the next steps are to identify elements that can be completed in the short term/on a trial basis as soon as possible, then provide guidance to Green International/DPW on the design concept development, bring the recommendation to the Select Board on short term improvements, and then start to determine longer-term improvements at a later date. He noted that the Town is a member of the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization which has authority to direct certain federal transportation funds to projects in the region, but the funding is highly competitive, and it can take many years to receive funding. He added that state Complete Streets funds might be another funding source but only if this project is on our prioritization list.

Goff suggested that Green International develop two updated concepts, based on what was discussed tonight, which would combine the elements of all the concepts reviewed. Maxtutis said it would be better to provide some clearer guidance to Green International so they know what aspects of the different concepts should be included, which likely requires at least one more meeting. Cayer agreed, and said she could reach out to the other businesses in the corridor about on-street parking and other possible changes to the intersection. Amstutz noted the Economic Development Coordinator may be able to help on this as well. Epstein asked about how to evaluate improvements made on a trial basis. Amstutz said different data points can be used, such as public feedback and technical data to determine if something is working. Most recent examples of trial or test projects in Arlington include the BRT Pilot on Mass Ave and the shared streets projects on Brooks Ave and Mary Street.

7. Adjourn.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 pm.